



The Seven: Gospel

October 29 | Weekly Devotionals

Day 1

This week we're taking a look at our priority of "Gospel." And before we dive too far in, we want to pause a moment and think about that word. Think back to a time before you heard a sermon on the concept of "gospel". How would you explain the gospel if someone had asked?

Take a few moments and write out what your response would be if you had to answer the question, "What is the gospel in one word?" Then reflect on why you chose that word.

Okay, onto round two. If you had to answer the question, "What is the gospel in one sentence?" What one sentence would you share? Again, reflect on what you wrote.

Now to the last round. If you had as much space and as many sentences as you wanted, how would you answer the question, "What is the gospel?" Use the provided space to write your response. Finally, reflect on what you wrote.

It's probably a helpful exercise to sit and articulate what the gospel is since it's so foundational to who we are as followers of Jesus. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians, this gospel is of "first importance..." (1 Corinthians 15:3).

The gospel is at the core of who followers of Jesus are. Tomorrow, we'll dig into some Old and New Testament passages to help us better understand it.

But, for now, we could just simply rest in knowing that the word “gospel” literally means “good news.” Let’s define news as something that happens in the past as a result of which everything is now different.

For example, when the Chicago Cubs won the 2016 World Series, everything changed. They had not won a World Series in 108 years. To Cubs fans, this news was cause for great joy. To Indians fans (whom they beat in the World Series), it was a stumbling block, and to everyone who didn’t care about baseball...well, the whole ordeal probably seemed like foolishness (see 1 Corinthians 1:21-24). But you get the point. The Cubs won. Kyle Schwarber, Kris Bryant, Javier Báez, and others have become household names in the world of baseball. The Cubs were now the champions. Everything was different.

You can probably think back and identify different pieces of news that changed your life in both large ways and small ways (and also in good ways and bad). Maybe it was the news of a college acceptance letter, maybe it was the news of your favorite sports team making it to the championship round, maybe it was the news of a new child on the way.

All of these examples have a couple things in common...

- Something happens in history
- The world is different as a result

In Jesus’ day, the word “gospel” was a message and a declaration that went throughout the land when a great military victory was won or, in certain cases, when a new king was born.

For our purposes here today, we can rest on the declaration that the core of the gospel is this: That Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection happened, and as a result, everything is different. A victory had been won. Sin, Satan, and death have been vanquished. Forgiveness of sins is here. The Messiah has come bringing his good kingdom.

Ultimately, Caesar is not in charge, the President of America is not in charge, and you and I are not in charge. Jesus is. He is the ruler of the Universe. And it is that reality, as Christians, that we shape our lives around.

Questions for reflection:

1. What is an example of a piece of news that radically changed your life?
2. How does narrowing down the gospel to simply, "Jesus is Lord" compare and contrast to how you defined it above?
3. Reflect on how the gospel has impacted you personally. What does it mean to have Jesus be King? What does it mean to you to have forgiveness of sins? What does it mean for you that Jesus defeated death?

Day 2

Yesterday, we looked at defining the word gospel. Today, we are going to dive into some of the relevant Scripture passages to better understand the term.

The Old Testament uses the Hebrew word *basar* when talking about "good news." In your translations, you might read it as "good news," "proclamation," "glad tidings," "to preach," etc. And we see it all throughout the Scriptures.

Look up the following passages and note the way in which "good news" is used. What is happening in and around these verses? What sort of connotations does "good news" have according to these verses?

- **1 Samuel 31:1-9 (see verse 9)**
- **Psalm 68:1-12a**
- **Isaiah 52:7-8**

Now, let's do the same thing with some New Testament uses of the word gospel. Again, look up the following passages and note the way in which "gospel" is used. What is happening in and around these verses?

What sort of connotations does "good news" have according to these verses?

- **Mark 1:14-15**
- **Luke 2:8-11**
- **Romans 1:1-4**
- **1 Corinthians 15:1-5**

Are you noticing a theme here? Like we mentioned on Day 1, the word gospel as it's used in the Scriptures carries notes of triumph, victory, kingdom, and ruling. In one of the Old Testament passages, we even saw that the word for gospel could be used in conjunction with the victory of the enemies of God's people because for them it would indeed be "good news." In the rest of the Old Testament passages, the word for "good news" most often indicates the reality that no one else reigns except God, that forgiveness of sins is available, and that a new Kingdom is here.

But that's not all. Now read these verses that explain the gospel without directly referencing the word itself. How do they expand or fill out the idea of the gospel for you?

- **Romans 3:21-26**
- **2 Corinthians 5:17-21**
- **2 Corinthians 8:9**
- **1 Peter 3:18**
- **Galatians 3:10-14**

As you can see, the gospel is a very rich and robust term! There's a lot that it connotes. And it's that reality that should propel us to worship!

With all of this in mind, however, we want to end today by simply contrasting the *news* of the gospel with the *good advice* that the world gives.

Good advice is positive and helpful. And everywhere you look you can find people or companies giving you advice about how to achieve your best life now, how to be happy, and what makes for a life well lived. There's nothing particularly wrong with that. But the point here is simple... good advice is different from good news. Good advice puts all the emphasis on what *you* need to do. And if you listen closely enough, sometimes the advice the world gives is conflicting!

The gospel is different. The good news isn't about what you have to *do*, it's about what's already been *done* for you. Big difference.

It takes the pressure off. No need to fret. God, in his mercy and kindness, has offered us salvation. All we are called to is to receive this good news.

Questions for reflection:

1. What do you think about the distinction between good advice and good news? What are some examples of "good advice" you follow to make your life as meaningful as possible?
2. What would it look like for you to receive the reality of the gospel into your life 10% more than you do right now?
3. How do the aforementioned Scriptures help clarify for you how you think about what the gospel is?

Day 3

Every piece of news has a backstory. For example, imagine living 1000 years in the future and reading a 2016 news headline that just said, "Cubs Win the World Series!" If you had no cultural context for that statement, you might really be confused. Baby bears winning something? World series? Series of what? The whole world is involved? There was a world-wide competition of baby bears?

What is happening here? You see how that could get slightly confusing, right?

The gospel of Jesus Christ is no different. It can sometimes be a little confusing. That's because the gospel isn't just a piece of news in a vacuum. It has a context. It, too, comes with a story (both past and future) that helps shed light on its meaning and implication.

In the opening pages of the Bible, in Genesis 1 and 2, we read about God's good, created world. In this world there was life, peace, responsibility, relationship, justice, and peace – all things that make for human flourishing were had in the Garden of Eden. Humanity was in right relationship with God, humanity was in right relationship with each other, and humanity was in right relationship with the Earth.

Humankind was given the responsibility to rule and have dominion over the Earth (see Genesis 1:26, 28). Unfortunately, they idolized themselves, wanting to be like God, and they rebelled. Because of this act of rebellion and their faulty dominion, humanity's relationship with God, humanity, and the earth was fractured and broken (see Genesis 3). And this brokenness plays itself out throughout the entirety of the Old Testament as Israel, from the family of Abraham, is given the task to rule on God's behalf so as to be a blessing to the nations (see Genesis 12).

Time and time again, however, they fail. And because they fail, they end up in exile. Despite Israel's mishaps, mistakes, and disordered desires, it was foretold that a prophet like (but greater than) Moses, a king like (but greater than) David, and a priest like (but greater than) Aaron would come to lead the people of God rightly – someone who wouldn't look to his own interests (like Israel), but would live a life fully surrendered to God. This someone was referred to as Israel's "Messiah" or "Christ."

This is who the New Testament writers refer to Jesus as – the person who was fully surrendered to God's will, the person who would bring redemption and salvation to

God's people, and the person who would reign and bring about God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus is God's Messiah. He is the Christ (Matthew 16:16).

Of course, some folks disagree (see John 7 for example), and Jesus is crucified. At the cross, however, we see that Jesus wins a decisive victory over evil, Satan, sin, and death through suffering love (not through military might or prowess). On the cross, Jesus was tortured and put to death. Jesus' blood was poured out. His side was pierced. Jesus became the propitiation for sins. As our sacrificial Lamb, Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice. He was better than any sacrifice ever made before. In fact, he was the ultimate, once and for all, sacrifice. The sacrifice to end all sacrifices (Hebrews 10:1-14). And to top it all off...on the cross, Jesus became king.

Then, by the Spirit of the Living God, Jesus was resurrected bodily from the dead (Romans 6:10-11), trampling over death by death (1 Corinthians 15).

There's no question that this is how the gospels portray the events of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, a theme picked up by Paul and others (see Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20). With Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's story, conquering the dominion of darkness, and being enthroned as Lord of the Universe, he is now bringing renewal and restoration to all of creation (Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 1:10).

That story is a little different than how we usually talk about the gospel. The gospel isn't just that humans can go to heaven when they die, the gospel's implications bring about the redemption and restoration of all the entire cosmos since it was marred by sin (Romans 8:20-21). This is what it means when we read about the coming of a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21) with no more tears, death, or pain.

This is important for us to realize because if the gospel is just about "going to heaven when we die" then we miss out on all of creation being redeemed and restored. The Gospel has a universal impact, not just an individual one.

This is, in short, the story of God. This is the story that the Bible tells us. This is the story that Christians claim as reality. This is the story that shapes who we are, the story that shapes our answers to all of life's questions:

- Who are we?
- Where did we come from?
- What's wrong with the world?
- What's the point of all this?

- Who's going to fix what's wrong?
- How do we live rightly in our world?

We'll talk about some other stories our world tells tomorrow, but could you imagine what would happen if this story came into the hearts and minds and lives of our church family? What would the impact be on our families, relationships, friends, and city if we lived out this story?

Questions for reflection:

1. When you think about the gospel story, which part resonated with you most? Explain.
2. What does that story reveal to you about God's character?
3. How does the story of the gospel help your understanding of what Jesus accomplished on the cross?
4. Write a prayer to God expressing your thanks, thoughts, and feelings about his story.

Day 4

The famed story expert Bobette Buster once remarked, "Narrative is our culture's currency; he who tells the best story wins."

We have already begun talking about the gospel story, but today we want to shift a bit and talk about other stories that try to compete with the gospel. To do that though, let's start with an illustration...

I remember hearing of a guy who visited the Dallas Cowboys stadium for a game and, in doing so, felt like he landed on "planet football." He had never been to a professional football game before so going to this game was eye-opening for him. He said that everything in and around AT&T Stadium was telling a compelling story to try and bolster the allegiance of people who were already Cowboy fans and to win the allegiance of people who weren't. How did the Cowboys tell this story?

Well, this guy went on to explain how everything from the parking lot banners with the big, blue Dallas Cowboy star on them to the memorabilia you could buy outside and inside the stadium, to the amount of people sporting Cowboys apparel, to the cheerleaders urging the fans to cheer for their team, to the giant endzone-to-endzone screen pumping up the crowd inside the stadium and replay only positive Dallas Cowboy plays, to past Cowboy players coming out at halftime to help invigorate the crowd – it all told a compelling narrative. That narrative essentially consisted of the following: Cowboy fans unite! THIS is our year! We have the guys to WIN! We can BEAT any team! We need YOUR help!

That was the story of the Cowboys. And they actually tell that story really well to win the allegiance of people everywhere. But, they're not the only ones telling a story like that.

If you pay attention to the companies, organizations, and people around you, you'll see that everyone is telling a story to win, as one writer says, your "mind space and brand allegiance."

They know that if they get your "mind space and brand allegiance," then they've got your time, your money, your support, and your evangelistic efforts.

As followers of Jesus with the gospel story in mind, it's important to reflect on what story or stories we are living out of. An important life axiom goes like this: "The story we live in is the story we will live out."

We talked about how much we are formed when we chatted about discipleship. A part of coming under the discipleship of Jesus is realizing what stories have been forming us so that we can be intentional about allowing God's story to reshape our thinking, feeling, and acting.

We each have a story or a framework that we live by – this story could have been shaped for us by our family of origin, our culture, our country, our friends, our desires, etc. Or...it could be some conglomeration of all of these.

Some people live according to the American Dream ("I'm just concerned with my two kids, nice house, and white picket fence and nothing else"), others by materialism ("I'm concerning myself with what I can get out of life"), others by secularism ("God is not really involved with my everyday life"), some by liberty ("I'm only concerned with my own individual freedom in any and every matter"), etc.

The list goes on and on and on.

The question for us though is this: Are we living in accordance with some made up story with certain promises that will ultimately leave us bankrupt or are we living in accordance with the gospel story?

Being intentional about living in God's story has always been a quintessential part of being God's people. This is why if you read through the Psalms, you see a *lot* of remembrance going on. The Psalms will often poetically retell God's saving work in the history of the people of Israel to help the reader live in the reality of God's story as opposed to any other.

Read Psalm 136.

Did you notice the repeated phrases?

"For His steadfast love endures forever"

Did you notice how the Psalmist retells the story of God's works and deliverance?

"To him...who made the heavens...who spread out the earth...who brought Israel out [from Egypt]...who divided the Red Sea in two..."

Questions for reflection:

1. What do you think are three influential stories that impact your life (for example, the stories of my family of origin, the story of consumerism, and the story of secularism are especially dominant in my thinking)? How do you see these stories impacting your day-to-day life?
2. What do you imagine God saying about each of those stories at work in your life? How does the gospel specifically confront those other stories?
3. What are some practical ways you can begin to adjust your story to align more with Jesus'? To more intentionally live in and live out of God's story?

Day 5

We're four days into studying the gospel story and how the stories of the world intersect with it. But, let's get a little more practical. One question we have to ask is "How does knowing all of that change things for us?"

Well, it should change everything! Here are three examples:

Example 1:

Think about how the gospel changes a person's tendency to struggle with comparing themselves to others. Often when one person compares themselves to another, they do one of two things: (1) They think of themselves better than the other person; or (2) they think of themselves worse than the other person.

The gospel confronts all of this though! In the gospel, we learn that every person is more sinful than we ever dare imagine (because Jesus had to die for us), but we also learn that every person is also more loved than we could ever hope to realize (because Jesus was glad to die for us).

With this knowledge in mind, and by fully internalizing it, it should shatter a person's tendency to compare themselves to others. They cannot think of themselves as better than their neighbor (because they are sinful too), nor can they think of themselves as lesser than their neighbor (because they are equally loved by God).

Example 2:

Think about how the gospel changed Kevin's interactions with one of his employees. Kevin owns his own business and hires a young man to join his team. Because of the type of business Kevin ran, this young man needed to pass some certification tests that required lots of study. The man studied long and hard, but when the test results came back, his scores were miserable. He had failed his certification. Walking into Kevin's office with his head bowed low and as small as he could make himself, he said to Kevin, "Kevin, I didn't pass. I feel like I've let you down."

In a typical business, an owner might at this point terminate his new employee. Instead, because Kevin knew that God had given him chance after chance, he was willing to give this young man another chance to pass his test.

That story has been simplified, but you get the point. The gospel intersected with Kevin's work and made an impact on this young man that he'll likely never forget.

Example 3:

Lastly, think about Martin Luther King Jr. There was a time when MLK Jr. was giving a speech and in the middle of it, a man from the crowd jumped up on the stage from which Dr. King was speaking and punched him, smashing him in the face. As *Smithsonian Magazine* reports, the assailant, "Punched him hard. And then punched him again. After the first punch...King just dropped his hands and stood there, and allowed the assailant (who turned out to be a member of the American Nazi Party) to punch him again. And when King's associates tried to step in, King stopped them: 'Don't touch him!' King shouted. 'Don't touch him. We have to pray for him.'"

That day, everyone quickly realized that although King was beaten, he ultimately won the fight.

That is the power of a person who has the gospel of Jesus. Dr. King knew that he had a Savior who loved him even when he was an enemy of God. Dr. King knew that God would rather die for his enemies than hurt them. On the day of that speech, MLK Jr. embodied that gospel reality and showed the world the transformative power of the gospel.

In all kinds of ways, the gospel, the reality of the good news of Jesus – forgiveness, Jesus' Lordship, Jesus taking our place – is there to intersect with our everyday lives. It can change how we think of ourselves, how we parent, how we love our spouses, how we work, and so much more!

The gospel changes everything!

"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." -Mark 10:45

Questions for reflection:

1. Which of these stories resonate with you most? Why?
2. How has the hope of the gospel changed your life already?
3. Think about the following five areas of your life: (1) family; (2) work; (3) friends; (4) finances; and (5) identity. How might the gospel impact each of these areas of your life?
4. Write a prayer asking God to transform you by the power of the gospel.